Work begins at Pickens city park

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The hard hats are donned and the tractors are fired up for a months-long construction project that will bring long-planned changes to the city of Pickens' Town Creek Park.

The park will see the addition of a paved greenway connecting the Pickens Recreation Center to the playground on the other side of the 100-acre property, a ½-mile long Flow Coaster bike track, 3,000 feet of trail for hikers and bikers and more.

The plan has been about three years in the making and stems from a recent push to draw more visitors to Pickens. The work dovetails nicely with the recently opened downtown amphitheater and ongoing efforts to revitalize the surrounding business district, said Katherine Hendricks, city administrator.

"We want them (visitors) to stay all day and use the park and watch music and eat in our restaurants and shop in our stores," she said.

In keeping with the overarching vision of the park as a cycling destination, two major features being installed are a dirt pump track course and 3,700-foot Flow Coaster, a wooden and earthen track that includes banked turns, balance beams, dirt jumps and more. It's like a "roller coaster for bikes," Hendricks said.

Pickens is already well-known to cyclists who come to train on its rolling, mountainous roads. The hope is that the new Town Creek features will broaden the reach and attract mountain bikers to the unique park from around the region, she said.

"We wanted to really create something that would be different than what other cities have," she said.

The Town Creek Park construction got underway last week and begins with the installation of a 70-foot recycled steel bridge over a Town Creek tributary followed by the creation of the Appalachian Lumber Greenway, an 8-foot-wide, mile-long paved walkway.

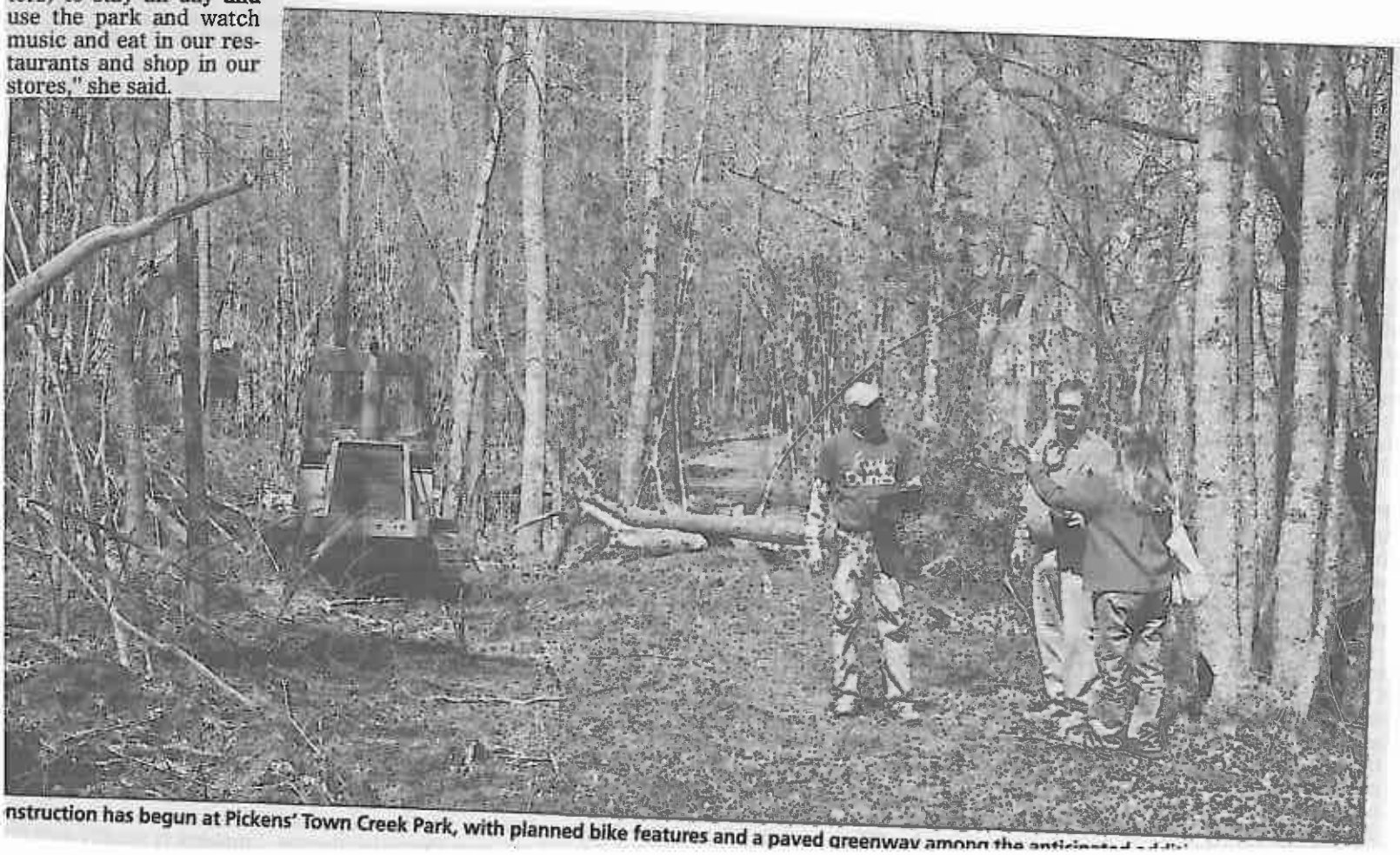
The handicap-accessible greenway will follow much of the existing trail, built primarily by volunteers, along the historic Appalachian Lumber Co. railroad route.

The $765,000 project has been financed by grants from the Appalachian Regional Commission and the South Carolina Recreational Trails Program and by funds from the 2 percent hospitality tax levied on prepared food and beverages. Those funds are restricted by state law for use in tourism-related activities, Hendricks said.

During the first month of construction, the Playground of Promise and tennis courts, near the intersection of U.S. 178 and Homestead Road, will be closed. Greenway construction is expected to be completed by July with the remainder of the project done by the fall. Both trailheads — at the playground and rec center ends of the trail — will likely be closed for several months.

The master plan for Town Creek Park includes future improvements and additions — picnic shelters, cabins, more trails and a disc golf course among them — but Hendricks said there is currently no timeline for those projects.

"It's really a growing process for us and trying to make our own niche and get people here," she said.



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